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India: Availability and prevalence of fraudulent identity documents (2004 - 2007)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

An official from the Canadian High Commission in New Delhi provided the following information to the Research Directorate regarding the availability of fraudulent identity documents in India in correspondence dated 17 April 2007:

To my knowledge there are no identity documents in India that are not altered or counterfeited frequently. Even when we send them for verification we cannot be sure that the "verifier" has not been paid to tell us the document is genuine.

Several media sources report the availability of fraudulent identity documents in India (*Hindustan Times* 24 Feb. 2007; *The Hindu* 22 Jan. 2005; *The Times of India* 5 Feb. 2006). According to the *Hindustan Times*, a couple who were providing fake passports and Pakistani visas were arrested for "helping people illegally migrate to Pakistan on forged visas" (24 Feb. 2007). Another scheme was discovered in 2005, in which fake visas were produced to travel to France and west Asian countries (*The Tribune* 21 Jan. 2005; *The Hindu* 22 Jan. 2005). Police recovered more than 30 passports and three French Embassy stamps in the houses of the accused (*ibid.*). *The Tribune* states that "[t]he police also claimed to have seized as many as 50 passports" (21 Jan. 2005).

In April 2005, three people were arrested for possession of false travel documents at the Begumpet airport; they were accused of affixing their photographs on someone else's passports (*The Hindu* 14 Apr. 2005). Another article reports the arrest of three people in February 2006 for selling fake visas to travel to Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Afghanistan (*The Times of India* 5 Feb. 2006). An article in *The Times of India* indicates that individuals whose visa applications are rejected in India can easily change their names and submit a new application for a visa under their new identity (24 Sept. 2006). The article adds that, in 2000, over 700 "bogus" passport applications were found by authorities in the regional passport office in Ahmedabad and that passport offices do not possess the resources to deal with fraud (*The Times of India* 24 Sept. 2006).

Two news sources also report the existence of schemes used to provide false documents relating to education (*The Hindu* 25 Jan. 2005; *ibid.* 27 May 2005; *The Telegraph* 18 July 2004). *The Telegraph* indicates that police discovered a racket producing fake report cards in 2004 and seized approximately 1,000 fake report cards, around 1,000 blank report cards, admission cards, certificates, progress reports and over 100 "rubber stamps" (18 July 2004). In January 2005, the Delhi police arrested two people for allegedly selling fake school certificates including fraudulent certificates from Bundelkhand University, Punjab Education Board, Gorakhpur University and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) (*The Hindu* 25 Jan. 2005; NNE 25 Jan. 2005). *The Hindu* also reports that the owner of a teaching institute was arrested in Shakarpur for forging school and college report cards and degrees, which he provided to his students (27 May 2005). According to *The Times of India*, an organized network which produces fraudulent documents, such as school certificates, operates in Gujarat, particularly in Nadiad (*The Times of India* 24 Sept. 2006). Some schools are believed to be involved in the production of such documents (*ibid.*).

According to *The Telegraph*, Calcutta University has requested support from the University Grants Commission (UGC) to develop a system that produces documents that cannot be altered or duplicated (19 July 2006). Information as to the outcome of this request could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Other sources also report the use of fraudulent documents with regard to drivers licences (*The Times of India* 12 Dec. 2006) and voter cards (*The Telegraph* 12 Feb. 2007). *The Times of India* reports that underage Indians use fake identity documents to obtain drivers licences and quotes the manager of a driving school in Mumbai who estimates that around 25 percent of youths applying for a driver's licence are underage (12 Dec. 2006). According to *The Telegraph*, a scheme producing fake voter cards "may well have flooded Bengal" (12 Feb. 2007). The network also provides fake ration cards to "Bangladeshi infiltrators," which will help them to get their names on the voter list; police could not indicate how many fake voter cards were in circulation (*The Telegraph* 12 Feb. 2007).

In regards to the accessibility of fraudulent identity documents, the following information was provided by the South Asia Desk representative of the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) in correspondence to the Research Directorate dated 30 March 2007:

Fraudulent [identity documents from] identity cards to passports could be obtained anywhere in India, as long as one know[s] whom to approach and where to find the person. For example the ID cards generally issued ... by the Election Commission carry a very poor photograph with which one could hardly make out a person. But for the election ID card, there are no single national ID card[s] in India. However, in border areas like north-eastern states and the state of Jammu & Kashmir, the military or the administration issues ID cards for locals. However, there is no unified process for this. [India is] a country where one could obtain a forged passport within a matter of hours and travel abroad....

In 2006, at the *Lok Sabha* (the People's Assembly), the following questions were put before the Ministry of External Affairs regarding fraudulent documents, and the corresponding answers were given:

- (a) Whether rackets involved in allegedly issuing fake passports are still flourishing in the country;
- (b) If so, whether some persons have been arrested recently on the charges of their involvement in the same;
- (c) If so, the number of persons arrested and the action taken against them so far; and
- (d) The corrective measures taken/proposed to be taken by the Government to plug the loopholes?

ANSWER THE MINISTER OF STATE [FOR] THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

- (a) Rackets in passports do come to the notice of the authorities from time to time.
- (b) & (c) Persons involved in rackets are arrested by the State Police periodically and actions taken against them as per law.
- (d) The Government has taken several steps to check the menace of fake passports. These include introduction of Machine Readable Passports (MRP), computerisation of databases, installation of intelligent computer terminals at international airports, pre-induction and reorientation training of immigration officials to detect forged travel documents. Whenever instances of fake passports come to light, the Government, in consultation with Security Agencies, revokes such passports, and holders of such passports are placed in Prior Approval Category (PAC). (India 8 Mar. 2006)

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: The South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre, the People's Union of Civil Liberties and two academics at Jadavpur University did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International, *Asia Times Online* [Hong Kong], Asian Human Rights Commission, Border Security Force, European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Factiva, Freedom House, *Frontline* [Chennai], Human Rights Watch (HRW), *The Indian Express* [Mumbai], *Indian Times*, Interpol, Ministry of Home Affairs of India, National Portal of India, Outlookindia.com, People's Union for Civil Liberties, Privacy International, South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre, United Kingdom Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND), United States Department of State, World News Connection.

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